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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 HARARE 001713

SIPDIS

STATE FOR AF, A/S KANSTEINER AND PDAS SNYDER; ALSO FOR AF/S, RAYNOR
PLEASE PASS USAID FOR ADMINISTRATOR NATSIO, AA/AFR NEWMAN,
AA/DCHA WINTER, AND FFP, LANDIS
NSC FOR SENIOR DIRECTOR FRAZER
ROME FOR FODAG

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TAGS: [EAID](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [EAGR](#) [PHUM](#) [ZI](#)
SUBJECT: WFP/UNDP REPORT A FOOD-FIGHT IN THE OFFING

REF: HARARE 1712

Classified By: DCM REWHITEHEAD DUE TO 1.5 (b) and (d).

¶11. (c) Summary. In a somber August 28 meeting, UNDP resrep Victor Angelo commented on the accelerating downward spiral of the Zimbabwean economy and increasingly difficult UN/NGO relations with the GOZ. The WFP Regional Director described a discouraging exchange with President Mugabe on NGO involvement in food distribution. Although there was no GOZ representative present to listen, donors hewed to the common position that GOZ demands to cede food recipient selection and physical distribution to local councils and headmen (reftel) is unacceptable, both for WFP-controlled and bilateral food pipelines. Angelo telephoned DCM after the meeting to say that he was expecting some difficult negotiations on a renewed MOU that would permit food distribution to continue and counted on strong U.S. support. We think that letting the UNDP take the lead at this moment is the correct approach, although this may need to be reviewed if the GOZ does not back away from unreasonable demands. It is our view that if they will not yield to reason, we must draw a line in the sand and halt further U.S. contributions until they agree to a status quo approach that will not politicize and fatally taint humanitarian food donations. End summary.

Gloom and Doom in the Room

¶12. (u) An unusually restrained Victor Angelo kicked off the meeting by reciting a list of dismal statistics about the Zimbabwean economy, none of these news to those in attendance.

-- GDP was down one-third since 1999 and stood to plunge at least another 20 percent in 2003.

-- Zimbabwe was 550,000 MT short of fertilizer for the upcoming agricultural season, with an equally serious seed shortages looming.

-- There would be little if any irrigated tobacco production during the coming cropping year.

-- Foot and mouth disease had enveloped Harare and moved north to the Norton/Chinhoyi areas. The GOZ had procured some HMD vaccine and taken other measures, such as decreeing that all buffalo on game farms and conservancies would be moved to national parks. How the latter might be accomplished is a mystery.

-- In the past three weeks, the GOZ had listed for seizure 375 additional farms to include plantations, export producing operations, and even some indigenous-owned farms.

-- The formal economy was withering.

-- The GMB claimed that it had procured 150,000 MT from the last harvest, a dubious figure. (Angelo told us last week that GMB probably had acquired no more than 40,000 MT.) The GMB also claimed that they would import another 340,000 MT, another questionable figure given the paucity of forex.

-- The brain drain continued apace.

Moving the Goal Posts

¶13. (sbu) Angelo said that there appeared to be a hardening of attitude by the GOZ toward the UN and cooperating partners involved in humanitarian feeding. The most obvious manifestation was the August 14 promulgation of new GOZ rules that shunted the NGOs aside and ceded food beneficiary selection and physical food distribution to local councils and headmen, most of whom are in ZANU-PF's pocket. In an August 20 meeting with Minister of Labor and Social Welfare July Moyo, Angelo said that he had warned that there was a

low level of donor response to the UN EMOP (for Zimbabwe) to date -- pushing ahead with the new rules would make it very difficult for UNDP/WFP to enlist sufficient donor support to meet the appeal. He said that Moyo had backtracked, stating that the new rules did not signify a meaningful change from existing procedures. Angelo said that this line ran counter to reports he had received of Moyo and other ministers meeting with NGOs in the provinces, where they stressed that the new rules would go into force. Minister of Information Jonathan Moyo, according to one press report, went so far as to say that NGOs that did not cooperate "would be cut off at the knees." Angelo said that negotiations were underway for a renewed one-year MOU between the UNDP/WFP and GOZ on modalities for humanitarian food operations for 2003 and 2004. The outcome of these negotiations would be critical to assuring sufficient and timely donor response.

The Donor Response

14. (sbu) The assembled donors responded in turn and in close harmony. There was universal agreement that the new NGO rules as now written would be unacceptable and would complicate donor participation. Policy clarity was essential before those present could speak definitively to their governments' response to the EMOP. No one said outright that they would refuse to contribute to a program stage-managed by GOZ/ZANU-PF proxies, but no one piled grain futures on the table either. The Angolan High Commissioner responded that there were positive signs on the political front and queried if a forward-leaning donor response might provide incentive for further progress. The DCM pointed out that the U.S. bases its contributions on humanitarian need and not political criteria. We seek a depoliticized program and need a similar commitment from whatever government we engage on this issue. Policy clarity referred to food distribution mechanisms and food security issues, not the political environment.

President Mugabe's Views/UN Counterpoint

15. (sbu) After the representatives of locally based UN specialized agencies delivered their set pieces, visiting WFP Regional Director Mike Sackett and WFP Representative Kevin Farrell offered some worthwhile insights. Sackett said that he had accompanied a visiting OPEC delegation (reportedly offering a package of USD 9 million for the regional appeal) to Zimbabwe and had participated in a meeting with President Mugabe. Mugabe had heard OPEC out and then turned to Sackett and brusquely demanded what WFP intended to do. Sackett had replied that WFP faced a "Herculean task" of sourcing 450,000 MT of food and moving it through the pipeline expeditiously. The August 14 announcement on NGOs had not helped. When Mugabe pled ignorance, July Moyo clarified, and Mugabe picked up the theme with "not encouraging" comments:

-- we cannot undermine local Zimbabwean structures.
-- NGOs have a political agenda.
-- Many NGOs are staffed with callow foreign youth.
-- Religious NGOs give food only to those of their own religious persuasion.
-- Mugabe himself had personally assured WFP's Jim Morris that food distribution would be apolitical, so there was nothing to worry about.

16. (sbu) Sackett said that following the meeting WFP had decided to send Mugabe a strong letter from Morris, the afternoon of August 28, stating the following, among other points.

--"for WFP, NGOs are crucial to distribution of food relief"
-- "It would be a SERIOUS (underlined) mistake to make changes to established procedures."

WFP's message to other parts of the GOZ were equally clear: WFP will tolerate no abuses and will cease all food distribution in areas where there are abuses. He said that WFP had instructed its field staff and NGO partners to be especially vigilant and diligent in reporting any changes. He concluded by noting that he hoped that recent developments would not halt planning for food pledges in donor capitals, since this could seriously imperil the food pipeline in the crucial January to March 2004 time frame.

16. (sbu) Farrell said that he too had prepared a strong letter to July Moyo urging that the GOZ maintain the status quo. He reported that August distributions were ongoing and that so far, "it is business as usual." He concluded by

explaining WFP policy reasons for rejecting a prescribed GOZ food for work program for the able bodied, since GOZ control of public work projects could translate into preventing those the GOZ does not favor from working, and thus eating.

17. (c) Angelo called DCM after the meeting to thank him and other donors for their solidarity and the implicit support this would give him as he went into further MOU negotiations with the GOZ. He said that he depended on strong donor support, and especially from the U.S. as the largest contributor, as he undertook what he expected to be bruising negotiations. He agreed that the EU had made a tactical error in publicizing significant food donations to Zimbabwe even before the GOZ appeal was released, thereby leading GOZ officials to assume that food would be forthcoming, whatever the prevailing climate.

Comment

18. (c) The U.S. has important bilateral as well as multilateral interests at play here, since the outcome of the UNDP/WFP MOU negotiation will provide a template for our own C-SAFE MOUs that must also be renegotiated before the end of the year. We agree that the best strategy for now is to let the UNDP take the lead and provide strong public and private support as needed/requested, both here and in Rome. Angelo is clearly aware of the stakes and does not want a failed humanitarian relief effort on his watch. Accordingly, he will not cut a deal that the donors cannot accept. Our principal interests here are to see that the vulnerable are fed, to continue unpublicized planning for U.S. contributions that will keep the food pipelines intact, and not to count coup on the GOZ/ZANU in a public tit for tat. If the UN does not prevail, however, we may still need to become directly involved and publicly pull back from any further food aid until the GOZ agrees to acceptable terms. One thing is clear. From a policy and from a humanitarian point of view, we cannot allow the GOZ to win a game of food relief chicken and replace USAID's clasped hands logo with ZANU/PF's clenched fist.

SULLIVAN